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‘The sleeping giant who left for America: The determinants and impact of Danish emigration during the Age of Mass Migration’

*“We have the power, but we don’t all know it yet, but the “Tyende”-class is a sleeping giant which will soon wake”*

- Westergaard (1907)

We consider the determinants and impact of mass emigration from Denmark between 1868 and 1908, mostly to the United States. We show that “laborers” and “*tyender*” (servants), who were heavily discriminated against under contemporary legislation, were highly overrepresented among emigrants. Hvidt (1971) describes how the *tyende* class desired upward social mobility, but in order to escape their position in society they needed to gain land. When this was not possible, they went to America. Thus, we make two contributions. First, we explain from where migrants migrated. Second, we demonstrate the impact this had on changes in local incomes.

We build on our previous work (Boberg-Fazlic et al 2020), where we demonstrate that the pattern of land inequality in Denmark throughout most of the nineteenth century was established following a period of extensive agrarian reform and enclosure between 1784 and 1807. Here we turn to the impact of this inequality, which was mainly channeled into an increase in the number and share of (almost) landless people in rural society. Hvidt (1971) explained how most emigrants left from areas with better quality soil, although the reasons for this remained unclear to him. Our hypothesis is that this is because they also saw a more unequal distribution of land, and there were thus less opportunities for *tyender*, or other landless laborers, who wanted land.

Our data is at the parish level and is taken from a variety of sources including population censuses; Danish police protocols of emigrants; land registers; and income tax records. Levels of migration were indeed strongly related to land inequality, as measured using the Theil index following Boberg-Fazlic et al (2020). We demonstrate causality by instrumenting for land inequality in the beginning of our period, 1860, with the change in inequality over the period 1682-1834. This captures the fact that the differential impact of the agrarian reforms on land inequality determined landholding patterns in the subsequent period, and this in turn determined the level of emigration over the following decades. Finally, we evaluate the impact of this emigration on parish-level living standards in Denmark as measured by income tax records, finding a positive relationship with the number of taxpayers and total taxable income. There is no robust effect, however, on the average tax paid per taxpayer. Nevertheless, overall, this constitutes a positive income effect of emigration on parishes since the number of people with relatively high incomes increased.